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SADDAM Husayn
(Phonetic: *sadDAHM*)

IRAQ

*President; Chairman, Revolutionary Command Council; Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces; Secretary General, Baath Party (since 1979)
Prime Minister (since 1994)*

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Saddam Husayn took power in a coup 26 years ago and quickly had at least 21 members of the ruling Revolutionary Command Council executed for alleged political crimes, according to press reports. In 1982 he personally executed Iraq's Minister of Health, who had suggested that Saddam resign in order to help end the war with Iran. His use of chemical weapons in the Iran-Iraq war during the 1980s and against his own civilian Kurdish population also has been well documented in the world press. Saddam supplements his brutal tactics by using ideology as a leadership tool. Media accounts indicate that he uses state propaganda organs and public displays to promote a cult of personality, to evoke pan-Arab and Islamic ideals, and to revive a consciousness of Iraq's historical and mythic greatness.

Since Saddam assumed the prime-ministership in 1994, he has taken responsibility for the government's day-to-day activities. He has portrayed himself as a "man of the people" by touring markets in Baghdad and has used the official media to revile black marketeers and hoarders.

Saddam was born in 1937 in the village of Tikrit. According to open source accounts, his childhood was harsh and abusive; he ran away when he was eight and reportedly committed his first murder by age 12. A few years later, Saddam traveled to Baghdad to live with his maternal uncle, Khayrallah Tilfah—a businessman, petty criminal, and Anglophobic anti-imperialist, according to published biographies and academic studies—and became acquainted with the writings of Baath Party founder Michel Aflaq. Saddam joined the Baath Party in 1957. The press reports that in 1959, Saddam was a gunman in the unsuccessful assassination attempt on then Prime Minister Abd al-Karim Qassim. He spent the next several years either in prison or exile. Saddam returned to Baghdad after the Baathist coup in 1963. He soon became a party leader and helped his Tikriti clan take over the organization. During the next decade and a half, he steadily gained power in the party apparatus and built up the security services.

21 February 1995

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